

CONGRESSMAN SHERWOOD BOEHLERT (R-NY)
OPENING STATEMENT FOR GRIFFIN HEARING
November 3, 2005

I want to welcome Administrator Griffin back to the Committee. After about six months on the job, he is still our hero. He has retained his candor, and he has been remarkably successful at fulfilling his commitments.

Dr. Griffin has put in place a top-notch management team, has put “meat” on the skeleton of the Vision for Space Exploration, has taken seriously the criticisms of NASA’s culture, has handled the Shuttle’s Return to Flight responsibly, has proposed tough but needed cuts in several programs, and has demonstrated his commitment to ensuring that NASA has robust programs in aeronautics, space science and earth science. This is precisely what NASA has needed, and just what we had hoped of Dr. Griffin. We are, I think, seeing the dawning renaissance of NASA, inspired by the leadership of Dr. Griffin and his team.

But a renaissance costs money, and I don’t see any Medicis waiting in the wings to underwrite NASA. So while NASA may have relatively smooth sailing right now, we ignore the clouds on the horizon at our peril.

Here’s what I mean, and I will be as blunt as possible: There is simply not enough money in NASA’s budget to carry out all the tasks it is undertaking on the current schedule. That’s a fact. The estimated shortfall between now and fiscal 2010 is probably between \$4 billion and \$6 billion. And that’s assuming that the current cost estimates for NASA missions are “on the money,” which is unlikely, even with the most careful cost estimating.

NASA has gotten in trouble repeatedly in the past by making promises that are beyond its financial means to fulfill. The Columbia Accident Investigation Board (CAIB), among others, have described that folly in excruciating detail. I don't want to see us go down that path again. Before NASA promises that it can accelerate development of the Crew Exploration Vehicle, and complete construction of the Space Station and have worthwhile aeronautics and science programs, it ought to be able to demonstrate where the money will come from. And right now, it can't.

And let me reiterate, as a supporter of the Vision, NASA cannot use aeronautics and science as a piggy bank to fund human space flight. And I know that Dr. Griffin shares that view.

The closest I've heard to an answer about these financial facts is, in effect, that we will need to address this financial shortfall in fiscal 2008. That's not all that far away. And so far as I can see, the only thing that 2008 has to recommend itself, is that it hasn't happened yet. I don't know why anyone would assume that we're going to be flush with cash in 2008.

This "wait til next year" mantra may be soothing for baseball fans, it's a poor motto for budgeting. Yet we're starting to hear it more and more. We're hearing it for example from officials at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) when we ask how they're going to get their key satellite program back on track. But that's a subject for another hearing.

I want to see NASA succeed. I want to see Dr. Griffin succeed. But we can't premise that success on money that doesn't exist and isn't all that likely to exist. And the time to discuss those hard facts is now.

Congressional debate on NASA is dominated by two factions, neither of whom trouble themselves with this budget problem. The first and larger faction are those who don't care much about NASA, and are particularly unimpressed with the Vision. The smaller but more effective faction thinks NASA is a high enough priority that it should get additional money no matter how tight the budget is.

I'm in neither camp. I support the Vision, but I think that it can't be allowed to break the bank or eat into NASA's other programs. And I hope we can get some guidance today about how folks like me – folks in the middle – the swing votes who can determine the outcome of debates, how we ought to proceed in this budget climate.

It's a good time to have that discussion, as we are beginning negotiations on our NASA authorization bill, and as Congress nears agreement on fiscal 2006 appropriations.

These are tough questions, but we've got the right man for the job at the helm at NASA to help us answer them.

Mr. Gordon.